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STORY

The only magazine devoted solely
to
the Short Story

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Only Short Stories are considered, and if and when any articles are used, they will be as rare as Short Stories of creative importance are today in the article-ridden magazines of America.

—from the first issue of STORY

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The Contents of This Magazine
Set by Hand
by
The Brothers Hollinek
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CANAL THIRD

by

Whit Burnett

Above, on the first deck, a steward had elbowed among the passengers, handing out tiny rolls of colored paper. And now, as the engines below churned into rhythm, shouting girls began to throw out streamers to their friends on the wharf, making quick colored lines through the grey atmosphere, pink, yellow, pale blue, green, orange and white against the flat, rainy dreariness of the sheds and buildings on the pier. The third class passengers, dressed in the dark coats and heavy shirts of poverty and practicality, stood in unacquainted groups, at the rail, watching the faint San Francisco rain settle in muddy pools, Novembral, cold, foreboding the onset of winter. Most of the third class passengers were single travelers. They knew no one on the wharf. They were men, mostly along in middle age. They stood solemnly and apparently unmoved. In the maze of twisted streamers thrown from above and hopefully reached for by some interested person on the pier, one now and then failed to carry, and fell downward across the cap of one of the third class passengers, who caught at it with a show of participativeness, and then laughed embarrassedly and held it, awkwardly, in his hand.

Shouted instructions, suddenly, and a final show of movements on the pier. The liner cast off. The wind, bringing with

it an increase of rain, whipped at the twisted paper bands. Slowly the big vessel edged away, and the tautened streamers broke, leaving little whisps of colored paper flying in the air, and friends aboard and left behind holding broken ribbons in the rain . . .

Grey gulls, hungry and rasping harsh cries against the wind, swept out in the wake, winging along behind as if held by unseen strings, kites diving and soaring. No one threw them anything. Gradually their flight became less frantic, steadier, rising and falling, silent glissandi of the air. The prison island, Alcatraz, rose for a time to starboard, a forlorn point of isolation in the bay, and then fell away in perspective, a grey button on the flat bosom of distance. Fog had come rolling down from the high hills of Sausalito. Through the Gate the sea was white with chargers of waves, sprayed plumes flying behind them, and the Esthonia, signalling as she passed the lighthouse, nosed into the open sea, bound for New York.

There was one woman in third class. But a day south of Los Angeles she was no longer seen in the dining room; she had changed to second. The dining room was far below. Tiny steps, of ladder-like narrowness, dropped into a darkish hole, which corresponded, at the other end of the ship, to the storage room. The men ate hungrily, their hard, weather-beaten faces bent over their plates. The food was served by Filipino boys, small, brown-faced fellows. The new arrivals at Los Angeles, a more mixed crowd than had boarded at San Francisco, dropped one by one down into the hole, and took seats at the oilcloth covered tables, their bags at their feet, while a third class steward looked at their tickets and assigned them cabins.

The only young man on the San Francisco list watched the incomers with youthful interest. Two other lads, he saw,

had come down. One was a tall, light haired boy of about twenty, ruddy cheeked and pleasant mouthed. The other was black haired and a little stunted looking. They were not together.

A middle-aged man appeared halfway down the steps to the dining room hole and stopped there, yelling back behind him, "Hey, porter, dere! Vot's de matter you! Hend me dat beggege!" He continued commanding, and holding up the line behind him waiting to descend the ladder-steps until he became the center of attention. He was short, with a small, pinched face and small eyes, obviously a foreigner or of foreign descent, and either Jewish or Polish, perhaps both.

"Who's takin' up the bleedin' stairways?" asked a voice above.

The newcomer finally desisted, moved on down the steps and went to an end of a table, where he sat down, and began piling up in a childish neatness his various bags, parcels, a cornet case, a phonograph and two heavy rubber boots he had had in his arms. He wore an all-leather cap, such is often seen further north along the Coast, which he removed finally and placed with a consideration, indicating it was still new, on the top of his pile. After a few moments, he nervously tossed his head, arose, and bounded up the steps to the deck.

A very tall, blue-eyed Scot, a little liquored, and his long, lean face reddened with the drink, pointed to his head and made a circular motion with his first finger. He winked in the direction where the Pole had been, and the dozen or so men who noticed laughed half-heartedly. The funny man promised to be amusing.

The ship got under way. In the half dark of the room a sort of melancholy silence settled over the passengers. Finally some

went on deck. Behind them, a few moments later, followed the young man from San Francisco.

Outside, Los Angeles harbor lay an unrippled surface of blue. A warm sun, for November, was shining. And within an hour the sea stretched like a plain westward to Asia.

Before the end of the day the three young fellows in third class knew each other. A gravitation of kindred ages if not of altogether mutual tastes had brought them together, all a little lost among the strange adults in the bottom of the ship.

The stunted boy, named Linn, was going back to "Joisey." He'd had enough of California. He hadn't found work.

"Jees'," he said, as the three hung over the rail watching for the occasional flash and skitter of flying fish, "you don't get any'ting out here—twelve, thoiteen bucks a week. Jees', I woi-
ked five years in a office back dere in New York. And ev'ry Saturday right dere—twenty-five smackers. If I didn't get sick o' New York I'd a been dere yet. Now I guess I gotta hang up wit de grandmudder in Newark till I can snag off anudder position like dat."

The boy had a defeated sadness about him, and he lost interest, at times, in what the others said, and looked away to sea.

The English lad, whose red cheeks betokened open lungs, was healthier. Mr. Small had made five dollars a day in the oil fields.

From oil field work he had gone into construction work, which was his father's trade in England, but contruction work had slackened, it seemed, in Anaheim, his last stop, and he had been laid off, with the others, at the end of a job.

"I fancied I might as well loaf the next four months or so around 'ome in Somerset as 'ere."

"Well, you fellows pass on through, but I'm going to stay

in New York," said the boy from San Francisco. He was about twenty, too. Unlike the others, he had not yet settled into any definite occupation. He had tried several types of work, he said, office work, selling, advertising. The indefiniteness of his vocation increased his restlessness. George Wilson had a slightly weak mouth and clear, straight-seeing northern blue eyes. He had borrowed the hundred dollars fare, and wore a large topaz ring on the somewhat soft fingers of his left hand.

"Sure," agreed the Jersey boy, "dat's de only place for a guy wid any brains."

Wilson looked down in the water. His departure, the first important outward stride in his life, returned to him, the rain, and the short stop at the office of the intellectual Mrs. Cox, in the rope and twine office, the gift of the books, "Conversations in Ebury Street," and the Waldo Frank book on New York, and then the encounter on the first deck with the Jewish youth from Brooklyn, a steward, who had "left a good both" as a publicity agent for some actors to work his way around the Canal to see what the Coast looked like. The Easterner's pessimism with the West encouraged him.

"Looks to me like a city with only one street, 'Frisco," the Brooklyner observed. "Even so, though, I would have stayed here for a while, if I could have caught on. I went around the newspaper offices. There wasn't anything doing. Winter's no time to come to California."

The Brooklyn youth, again wearing the uniform of a deck steward, had caught ship once more and was working his way back home. He obligingly pointed out the third class hatch and Wilson had gone down into the semi-darkness of the ship.

The days got warmer, until a steady hotness spread across the white decks of the big steamer, and the third class passengers

appeared on their reserved spot coatless, their suspenders showing over their blue or brown shirts, their hats off, and a little knot always present at a doorway where a steward had opened a tiny bar and was selling baccardi and whiskey. There were only one or two deck chairs and the men sat on chains, winches, the deck itself, or hung across the rail.

One afternoon, about four, when the sun was beating down, the little Polish Jew, who had toted around his portable phonograph for days opening it any place on deck or below and playing the few records he had, set down the machine and went aft. The stanchion from which the log-line played behind the ship caught his eye and, for no accountable reason, he decided to climb up its thin white spar to the deck above where the second class passengers were playing deck games.

When he got up the pole, with his hands clinging to the jutting floor of the upper deck, the little man, who had been shouting, merrily, to attract attention to his escapade, found, suddenly, he could not lift his weight to reach security.

The grin on his pinched face was wiped off, and a full fright seized him. He could not swing his short legs back to safety and he dangled in space above the open sea.

"Hey dere," he yelled. "Hey dere!"

The men at the bar, with glasses in their hands, ambled around to the rear of the ship, where they caught sight of the little man clinging for his life to the upper deck.

"For Christ's sake," said the ruddy, round butcher from Iowa, "what's The Conductor doin' hanging over the scenery like that for?"

"Nuts!" commented the Scot, who had remained in the same bleary-eyed haze since boarding the vessel.

"Come on down out of there, Nuts," said the Iowa butcher. "You want to kill yourself?"

"Hey dere!" screamed the Pole. He was unable to articulate further.

The excitement in his voice had attracted official attention. The Baggage Steward from the upper deck, a huge Englishman, suddenly appeared, and with one vault was up the stanchion, and had the man in his tremendous arms.

He deposited the limp figure on the deck.

"'alf a bloody instant longer and you shouldn't be 'ere to tell the taylor." He was angry. "Wot's eating of you, shinnying up the side like that?"

The man made no response. He looked up sidewise and grinned whitely.

The Jersey boy had pushed his way into the crowd to look. He returned to the two boys standing apart by the rail.

"Jees', he's a case, dat baby!"

The two tall youths, a little less insensitive, perhaps, or more embarrassed by the emergence of strange, unfamiliar elements in their midst, looked on, unparticipative.

By and by they fell in conversation with the Baggage Steward. He was a clean-shaven, open-mannered Britisher, and they liked him. He told them of narrow escapes, in storms, with falling hatches . . . All the crew was British.

"They come over to the Canal Route," he said, "from the North Atlantic service. In the Spring they hall go back. More money, shorter runs. 'Owever, they're glad to get us Britishers. The American is a short sailor. Hallright for a voyage or two. But 'e 'as no permanence. Primar'ly 'e's not born to the sea. 'e's mainly hinterested in sight-seeing."

The excitement of the afternoon had worn away.

The little Pole had again started up his phonograph. By his side he had his inevitable little suitcase which was filled with hats. He carried more than a dozen hats and caps, which

he was forever changing and rechanging, delighting in turning a corner in one and appearing before his shipmates an instant later in another. His favorite, however, was one with a visor on it. It was a trainman's cap. It seemed he had worked on a Canadian railroad, not as a trainman, but as a section-hand. He had been hurt, somehow, and paid a rather large insurance sum. He was going to New York to "look the big city over," he said, in colloquial style. His favorite cap won him the title of The Conductor.

By the eighth day no one, however, considered him funny. At table, the passengers had taken a dislike to him. The Scotsman had begun to hate him, in a mumbling sort of way. And the Iowa butcher took a keen fat pleasure in drawing the little Pole out, about his railroad experience in Canada, and then, suddenly, bursting out laughing at an uproarious pitch and slapping his thighs.

"That's rich," he said. "By God, that's rich! Listen ol' Nutsy here. Tell 'em that again, Conductor!"

Just before the ship put in at Panama, there was a conference upstairs, and the officers decided, for his own good, to keep the Conductor on board. The other passengers, tired of ship's booze, smacked their lips. Panama had tap beer.

The passengers were duly impressed with the tropical exoticism of Panama, and those with money brought back, after the few hours they were permitted on shore, Panama hats which were in most cases too big and would require shrinking, tasseled *mantillas* of garish colors, and breaths smelling of strong liquor or eyes mellow with beer. The third class passengers returned more obviously drunk than those in the other classes, and even from the deck the stewards above could catch evidence of the effect of the liquor, when two or three third classers for some

reason or perhaps for none at all fell to violent fighting in front of the gang plank. They were separated. The Scotsman had taken a couple of vengeful swings at the talkative butcher. The butcher had paled suddenly, ducked, and was in a fright. His apoplectic face had lost its flush. The Scotsman spat, elbowed the Iowan aside and went a bleary, individual way up the side of the ship.

The three boys, who had hung together on their walk, agreed they had never seen so many bananas in their lives.

"Jees'," observed the Jersey boy, "can y'imagine! Nickel a dozen. And nice bananas like dat, too. I guess they wouldn't be profitable in Noo York!"

They bought fresh pineapples and watched the small boats in the fruit harbor, lying in crisscrossed confusion, hollowed logs and rowboats filled with mounds of golden grown things.

They had beer under some trees, by a public square and a monument, and watched black women carrying goods on their heads, an old black woman with a rooster in her arms.

None of the boys had money to spare. They bought nothing of consequence and arrived back at the boat as the Scotsman was shouldering his way past the butcher.

The ship moved slowly through the still water of the harbor, and into the still quieter Canal. Balboa was left behind, with the Army officers' wives ashore at their *siestas*, unaware of the departure; an American Army plane zoomed high in the clear sky overhead; the hot sun settled over the rich foliage on the nearby banks and a warm dampness made the air lush and soporific. In half an hour a little rain fell, the sun returned as hot as ever, and the ship seemed gliding without effort, almost without meaning, so quiet was the water.

As the vessel moved, later, in the smooth great lake, miles of drowned trees were evident, tangled dead things, with

greyed, barkless trunks and limbs protruding from the lake's shallow parts like skeletons whose flesh had been eaten away gradually, leaving them fixed in a futile, clawing gesture after life.

The butcher, who had left California after being bossed about for wages in a chain store because he had been unable, with his Iowa savings, to find a suitable place reasonable enough to open his own shop, was again at the bar. He had been a loud-mouthed raconteur up to the time the disgruntled Scot had taken a poke at him, and he reassumed his ordinary tone as usual when the Scot was not around. The Scot was asleep in a deck chair aft.

"When things get humpy, I move," he said, largely. He told them all how much he'd moved. Cleveland, Chicago, Brooklyn, San Francisco, Los Angeles. But Iowa was still his home. He boomed out with a couplet from a song, "That's Where The Tall Corn Grows."

At Panama a number of persons had boarded the ship, including a snappily dressed Negro in a checked grey suit, who was pointed out by a Panama American as the feather-weight champion of the Caribbean. He was dropping off at Havana for a bout. He had a large diamond on his finger and another in his tie of bright yellow silk. He wore a brown derby and patent-leather shoes. He walked back and forth by the rail, and avoided the bar.

A man with a beard, long and black, had also got on, carrying with him a rug, which at twilight he put on the deck and kneeled on, raising and lowering his trunk, his hands clasped before him.

"By God," said the butcher, "old Nutsy ought to see this Now we got two locoes."

The bearded man was accompanied by an extremely pale woman, evidently his wife.

At midnight there was a loud screaming, which could be heard throughout the lower quarters. The woman, the doctor said the next day, was epileptic.

In the excitement several passengers came out of their cabins, their pants hurriedly drawn up around their warm bellies. The Scot had taken several nightcaps and having sprung out of bed, hazily, wandered in the corridors for some time, seemingly unable to find his cabin . . .

The third class passengers were eager about Havana. The stop at Panama, in full daylight, for the few short tantalizing hours, and ending without the necessity of adjusting themselves to a first night in a strange place, had filled the men with feelings of unsatisfied adventure, of bravado. The Iowa butcher, standing at the bar, told numerous stories of gay adventures in St. Louis and New Orleans in certain sections of the towns. The two Lancaster men spoke of things they had seen in Liverpool.

Half a dozen men got on at Panama -- and the young man from San Francisco lost the privacy of his tiny cabin to a mild-eyed, grey-haired little old man with a wooden leg which he strapped on in the mornings and unstrapped and hung up at night. He was a pleasant enough companion, but a little hard to converse with because boiler-making had partially destroyed his hearing.

"This is an odd shipful of people," young Wilson offered, as they sat opposite each other on their bunks, their heads bent beneath the fixed inconvenience of the two upper bunks above them. "All busted. All sick of California. Most of them

using up their last hundred dollars for seventeen days of food and lodgings to get from one side of America to the other. That Scotchman has been drunk since he got on board. And there's a loud-mouthed butcher, a nut with a prayer rug, and a crazy man who wears forty different hats."

"Poor devils," said the boiler maker.

He wore silver glasses, and though he peered hard through them, under white eyebrows, there was a sympathetic softness in their clarity. He was, as near as possible, a vegetarian, and he believed that if the people were ever rightly informed they had an inherent goodness which would make them highly important. He was a left-wing Socialist of many years standing, and in more than one boiler-makers' union meeting had been called upon to support his views with action, which had not found him lacking with his fists.

"Did you ever read the first chapter of Marx's Capitalism?"

The young man confessed he had not.

"If you want to understand all these poor devils," said the boiler maker, "go to the public library when you get to New York and read the first chapter of Karl Marx."

On deck, the men around the bar had become friendly with a couple of the newcomers from Panama City. The new passengers fell in with the general mood. They declared the ship's passengers had seen nothing yet. Panama, they expanded, was one of the really widest open cities in the world. But take Havana. Why, my God, girls! . .

The pure blue of the Caribbean, stormless for days, glittered in unbelievable limpidity. Now and then a small freighter stood out along the horizon. The weather was calm and only the expectation of excitement in Havana furnished food for

conversation. The ship was to dock at noon and not to leave until midnight.

"I'm going to look into this night life you hear so much about," said Small, the young Englishman. "I say, that's the thing to be done in Havana, isn't it?"

"Jees, all de night life we're going to see on about a dollar twenty!"

"The old boiler maker with me says Havana is a tough town," said Wilson. "Every now and then somebody off a ship gets taken for his roll."

"I shouldn't care to be rolled," said Small. "I have to buy my ticket to Southampton after I get to New York."

"A whole day in Havana," said the Jersey boy, "Jees', I guess dat won't feel good to the old dogs! Solid ground that don't go bouncing around. Jees', when I got off dere in Panama I begin walkin' like a sailor."

The Jersey boy cracked a smile, but it pained him. He had a peculiar swelling under his chin.

"Munch a pickle," suggested Small. "I think it's mumps."

There were no pickles in the ship's stores third class. The boy tasted a little vinegar and his pained expression confirmed their doubts. It meant, they believed, that he would not be permitted ashore at Havana.

The only other person who had come into trouble was The Conductor. Out of some spirit of mischief or perversity or revenge, he had stolen a large fish from the cook's pantry. This was bad enough, for the Filipino had come running after him with a knife, and then somewhere lost him. But what put him under lock and key for the rest of the voyage was his irresponsibility immediately afterward. He was taken off the

deck by a couple of stewards as he was building a sizeable fire with blazing paper and wood on which he proposed to cook the fish on the open deck.

The ship was late. Instead of pulling in at noon, it was 5:30 before the grey walls of the old Morro castle loomed up on the island. On the upper deck passengers with cameras out put them back in their cabins. The high sun had sunk and a slight fog made misty the sky with a vague shadowless whiteness. As the ship crept along the Cuban shore, the trees and houses slowly became distinct. At 6 o'clock the Esthonia slowed to a vibrationless standstill and a tiny boat from the harbor came alongside with the quarantine officers.

The inspection lasted a tedious time. The boy with the mumps was kept on board. The Socialist, who was riding on a non-transferable ticket he had bought from someone in Panama City, wished to avoid the risks of any more inspections than were necessary, and remained in his cabin.

"If I went ashore, I'd get drunk. And if I got drunk, I'd get in trouble," he told his young cabinmate. He spoke quietly, and softer, not louder, than a man with good hearing. "Everybody will get drunk. I don't blame them. Drunkenness makes up with them for something they haven't got. Under a capitalist system there will always be drunkenness."

The young man did not quite understand. He tried to reconcile this with the continued blearyness of the Scotsman, who for some reason or other had not yet sobered up, and who, since the night he had been wandering around in his pants, had been mumbling about being robbed of \$200, although several passengers said, in his absence, that they did not believe he ever had \$200.

"I don't mind a drink now and then," said Wilson, "but I don't make a practice of it."

"You're young," said the boiler maker, "and you have good sense and hope."

Small and Wilson quit the ship together, following along behind the dark forms of the third classers down the ship's steps overside to the ferry. The first class passengers in top-coats, summer furs and gloves, were already on the bobbing craft, chattering and looking toward the far glitter of the lights of Havana.

Some of the ship's officers also went ashore. The crew, young fellows all, stood by with long faces, watching their departure. They had been forbidden shore leave in Havana. Havana was a sore spot with ship's officers. Its attractions caused too many desertions

The two boys did not know exactly where to go to enjoy themselves. They walked up from the docks, past an old Spanish church, the walls of which had slowly been eaten into by time and the fallible constituency of plaster. The gaunt holes, like the pock-marks or ravishes of disease, gave the sense of age, and under a moon, these holes were black shadows. The moonlight fell on the leaves of the trees in a park like frost, and to the south a high yellow star glittered in a paled twinkle of flame.

Past the square, filled with palms and heavy flowering trees, the main part of the city seemed to lie, golden arc lights blinking everywhere, and a great rattle of traffic in the narrow streets, as small automobiles, picturesquely upholstered, with curtains at their windows or hanging over the backs, honked furiously by, grazing pedestrians, who were leaving the just closing stores.

"Do you see any *senoritas*?" asked Small.

"Not a *senorita*. On a Saturday night, maybe, the Spanish woman's place is in the home," offered Wilson.

Past them, in the full light of the shop windows, strode well-dressed, young, dark-skinned men, packing canes and wearing stiff straw hats and polished shoes. The two boys, both wearing flannel shirts and caps, felt out of place. The elegance of a tropical Saturday night impressed them. The warm November evening seemed made for idleness and elegance, walking-sticks and straw hats, band concerts, perhaps, in a park, and the soft leisurely glances of beautiful girls.

They went inside a crowded, noisy cafe, where a number of loud speaking Americans were standing in the traditional attitude at the bar. They sat at a table and had two beers, paying in American quarters and receiving small silver pieces in exchange.

"It must be great to live in a country like this. Beer every day, if you wanted it," said Wilson.

"I'd give all your beer for a handy pint of Bass now and then. When I get 'ome, perhaps we won't 'ave Bass on the table! Oh, my, won't we!"

The English lad had a girl in Somerset, and he thought he might, in time, get married. He had spoken about her. He had gone out a bit with a girl in Anaheim, too, but they hadn't done much about it, he had said.

It was not quite seven o'clock, and the Americans at the bar were taking cocktails for *aperitifs*, and the clang of the automatic cash register, the clink of glasses and the sharp testing ring of silver money on the marble counter blended into an almost constant pitch, like some atonal chorus against which

now and then some louder individual voice rose in emphasis or even in the snatches of a song.

"I fancy this is a bit like the Barbary Coast, isn't it," asked the Englisman.

"I don't know," said Wilson. "I never went down there much when it was wide open. Anyway, it's all changed now."

"Perhaps it's more hospitable here," suggested Small. "The Latin races are more 'ospitable."

"Excuse me, gentlemen," said a heavy, rich voice behind them, "but you gentlemen all talkin' about hospitality. Well, here's where she grows."

The speaker was a Negro, extremely broad shouldered, thick through, and with a wide, good-natured face many shades blacker than the sun-tinted hues of the islanders.

"Ah reckon you all's strangers, eh?"

"We're just here a couple of hours. We're on the Esthonia."

"Oh, yes, indeed! Ah knows the Esthonia. Mighty fine liner, Esthonia. But while you boys all here, you goin' to look into the night life, Ah suppose? Mighty few cities in this here ol' world like Havana. Some folks call it de Paris ob de Caribbean. And speakin' ob Cuban hospitality, such as in *houses*, for instance—leave all dat dere to me. Ah kin show you the entire town, com-plete. Ah knows 'em fum A to Z."

The English boy blushed.

"We'd like to see the sights," said Wilson, "but if you knew how broke we were —."

"Ah've ben bruck mahself," said the colored man. "Ah knows de sensation. But foh twelve dollah Ah kin show you de combination dat will upset de town."

The Negro accepted a glass of La Tropica beer, which, he said, informatively, was the best. He said his name was

Harry Delisser. He had a sister in Harlem and if the boys ever got up to Harlem here was the adress, 153rd street, and just say you run into Harry in Havana, and he was doin' big. The boys noted the address, and the three topped off the beer. For three dollars and a half, taxi fare extra—the boys having to be back on the ship before a good guide's night work really began—Mr. Delisser agreed to take them 'round.

From the Plaza hotel corner, the tiny Ford taxi careened down the narrow streets, cutting a jogging way through a sinister section of shuttered windowed houses where the darkness and strangeness was emphasized by the small street lights at the corners. From upper windows little balconies reached out over the street, and on two or three the boys saw women seated heavily shawled and mysterious. Both felt the excitement of the unusual in the curious taxicab whose doors were draped inside with lace and tassels, speeding around corners and down streets gloomy and rich with mystery.

"This is Frenchie's," said the Negro. "Just you all stay in the cah and Ah'll rap 'em up. It may be a trifle early for Frenchie, I'm afraid."

He stood on the sidewalk, before a shuttered house of three stories without balconies and pulled at a bell. He pulled again, and then a third time. He shook his head dubiously. Finally there was a sound inside, and a small panel in the door shot partly open.

"It's Harry," he said. "Ah got some 'Merican boys'd lak to come in and visit few minutes."

There was a pause.

"What?" queried Harry, his ear to the panel.

He returned to the cab.

"Well," he said, and he took his place between the visitors, "that's what you mought call French hospitality."

Frenchie and her girls, he explained, were having dinner and it was too early.

"The French," said the Guide, "they ah a funny race. They'd rather eat most times than make a coupla hones' dollahs."

He was a little apologetic for the initial failure, but it was fairly cussed early to see night life at 7 o'clock . . .

The next place, several blocks further, was a modern Spanish building, into which the boys and Harry were ushered by an aproned maid. The hallway was white plaster, and into a reception room in which a crucifix hung and a few old Spanish chairs were scattered, the three were shown.

The Negro excused himself and returned a few moments later with a woman of thirty-five or so, dark-skinned but not Negroid, smiling and slightly fat.

She bowed, extended her hand, and invited them in Spanish to sit down.

"*Habla Ud. español?*" she asked.

The boys looked blank.

"*Americanos,*" said Harry. "*Hublan solamente ingles.*"

Small blushed again.

"I'm English," he said.

Whether from racial pride or embarrassment, Small remained a vivid red during the time they were in the Spanish house.

"The girls are having dinner," said Madame. "Won't you come into the dining room?"

The boys sheepishly picked up their caps and followed the big Negro and the Spanish woman.

On their way Wilson nearly bumped into a Spanish girl. She had just come in. She was slight, dark-eyed and flowerlike. She removed her hat and coat. Her hair was heavy and dark. She said a word or two of apologies and took her seat at the table.

Four other girls, dressed soberly and resembling the young women one might have seen in the shops or Spanish homes, were at the table in the middle of the room. The older woman, like a mother, ladled out the soup. The boys and the guide took chairs in a corner, where the maid brought them each a pint of beer, placing it on a taboret in front of them.

"Sorry to bust in on you when you're having dinner," said Harry. He explained that his clients were interested mainly in just having a look, anyway.

The girls, who had matters of their own to discuss, talked in low voices among themselves and now and then laughed or giggled. The sight of the girls sipping their soup, their pretty, bird-like faces—for there was none over eighteen—seemed so homelike and restful the boys relaxed a trifle and drank their beer. They stretched their legs in a degree of comfort. The beer was slowly mellowing their outlook, when Harry Delisser made a motion with his head, and they paid up to go.

The beer cost fifty cents a bottle.

As they rose Wilson tried to catch another glimpse of the young Spanish girl he had nearly bumped into.

She lifted her eyes, which were wide and deep and soft with an inherent capacity for love. The young man stood, arrested for an instant. There was nothing to say. He could speak no Spanish. His cold blue eyes lingered, half against his will, and then the three were somehow out again at the upholstered taxicab.

"The Palms, that'd be open," said George. "Dere you'll find some your own countrywomen folks. We could take a spin over dere . . .

The tour ended early. It had not cost a fortune. The boys shook hands with the Negro and began to head back for the ship.

"I never saw such hatchet faces in my life," said Small, "as in that American place. And the price they wanted for that little glass of Baccardi!"

"Pittsburg Mary," recalled the young man from San Francisco. "I bet Pittsburg would disown her if she ever opened up there."

The American place, owned by a member of the city government and catering to a clientele of visitors who preferred their women dressed in long flowing brocaded dresses, had left the young men with a feeling of loathing. The women they had seen had no charm. They were huge, fat, gross, like tremendous animals among the potted palms, half feathers and skirts, half gold teeth and sweat smell and pudgy-handed, flabby-shouldered flesh.

"God, I'm glad to get out of that place," said Wilson.

They were at the Prado park. The moon was sailing high and the business traffic had ended. The late livers of Havana were just emerging from their homes to go fashionably dressed to the brilliant dining rooms of the city. The two boys saw many persons, riding in the little taxies or in carriages, dressed in evening clothes, clean, beautiful, leisurely opulent, smiling at each other.

"I prefer the Spanish place, with those young pretty little girls," said Wilson.

"They thought I was an American," said Small.

"You blushed all the time, that's why, maybe."

They continued their walk. It was after ten.

As they came closer to the waterfront, they identified half a dozen of the first class passengers, their arms full of liquor bottles and cigar boxes. They were walking heavily toward the piers and talking loudly.

The wide cobblestoned embarcadero was lined with last minute bars. In one, called the Two Brothers, a genial brilliance of lights glistened on the bottles and threw into recognizable relief eight or ten men passengers of the Esthonia's third class.

"We ought to have one final glass of beer," said Wilson. "Maybe we can get another sandwich."

They entered.

"There's a couple more Esthoniaeers," said some one.

"Hail, hail, the gang's all here!" began the Iowa butcher.

Others joined.

"What the hell do we care, what the hell do we care NOW!"

From the harbor the liner blew a warning blast. The little ferry was waiting at the wharf. The third class passengers began an excited drinking and paying, swearing, joking and wide-armed gesticulating. One or two caught a final slug of whiskey as some of the others pushed at them, forming a line, which in a few minutes became a snake-dance, a lock-step, a fantastic, weaving, concentrated dance-march toward the wharf. The two boys, pushed in, caught the rhythm, and sang, loudly, with the others, "Hail, hail, the gang's all here."

Against the darkness and the stillness of the wharf section night the procession passed raucously toward the piers.

"We oughta have The Conductor in this," yelled the butcher.

"Or that prayer leader, maybe," shouted some one else.

"Hail, hail . . ."

"Back to our holes," some one cried. "Good old Esthonia. Home Sweet Home."

The passengers were again identifying themselves with the small bunks and tiny cabins in the bowels of the liner.

As they staggered, burdened with bottles or a little dizzy from the drink, up the steep steps to the deck, one or two fell and had to be helped on board.

The Scotsman was not among them.

A few minutes before eleven, after the first whistle for departure, a motorboat pulled alongside, and the red-faced Scot paid off the boatman and stumbled gloomily on deck.

"I guess we're all here," said somebody.

The first class passengers went into the dining room, where the stewards had laid out cold midnight suppers to settle the passengers' stomachs.

The passengers below were retiring. The third class bar was closed. The Scotsman, in his cabin, opened his whiskey and took a substantial night cap, as the vessel, in the still harbor water, quivered slightly into movement.

Small had stopped in with Wilson to talk with the boiler maker. The sad faced boy with the mumps had come along.

"Jees," he said repeatedly, "some guys get all de breaks." Finally they had left.

Tolerantly, and with whimsical wrinkles at the corners of his eyes, the little boiler maker had taken in the sights, second-hand, through the impressions of the youths.

He unstrapped his leg, finally, and hung it on a hat hook on the door. Wilson had an upper berth which looked out the open port-hole.

"Well," said the boiler maker, "in another four or five days, we'll be in New York — — . Looking for jobs, I guess," he added.

"Yep," said the young man from San Francisco.

He was thinking of other things. The deaf man turned the light out. The ship was moving swiftly. There was no stopping the young man's thoughts. He could not remove from his mind the picture of the little Spanish girl, whose soft, large, dark, kind eyes had rested on his own, and whose body had accidentally brushed against his in the doorway.

With a cane and a straw hat and a job in Havana, he saw himself. Someone honored, somehow, exactly, he did not visualize. Entering the Spanish place, rather freely and with the familiarity of prestige and power. And then taking the girl out of the place and having one's own apartment with a balcony which overlooked a park with palms and gave out distantly toward the blue Caribbean . . .

The ship had veered into the wind, and the port-hole flew further open. The wind was sharp, with a sudden shocking tingle of ice in it. The ship was out of the harbor, ploughing the sea. The cold air came from the north. And with it the strange beauties of the night passed from the young man's mind. There were letters to write to American building concerns for the little boiler maker. That he'd promised. And there was the necessity now to think of a job in New York.

And with the wind, it was suddenly November. New York . . . with granite-shouldered buildings rearing in the sky, wind and snow on the streets, and the whole tremendous lostness of New York, knowing no one, knowing nothing. lost!

The boy could not go to sleep. His feet were cold. His hands were cold. The virginal conception of a place without

a conquest. He envied, for an instant, the boilermaker, who was old and undisturbed.

The liner, fighting a windswept sea, found its gait. The long rolls were predictable, regular and not unsoothing. The ship, in all the strata of its classes, was, at last, asleep, the tiny lights fore and aft twinkling beneath the unhurried stars. The young man was in New York. He was riding down Broadway, among the palm trees, in a high silk hat. By his side sat a young woman with eyes brown as the deep topaz. And from the balcony windows of skyscrapers people were throwing colored streamers of paper down upon them which they tried, in a friendly, eager way, to seize as they fell, as a cold wind caught them, always, and whirled them fluttering, broken, twisted, somewhere out to sea.

BIRTHDAY

by

Bessie Breuer

To take the past for granted. That would be the way. Not to refer to it. Not even a wave in the voice, or an emotional quit—that would be most dangerous. The old time pal. The friend. The telephone booths were all occupied. She waited. Saw next to her a famous athlete waiting too. He should not be here, alone and unattended, she thought idly. Where the cheering galleries, Wimbledon and Forest Hills? He had no match and asked the page for one, with a studied modesty, a balanced motion and gesture, a courtly thank you. Did that little fellow know whom he served? Lighting his cigarette with an air of conscious hauteur. Pacing a few steps this way, a few that, he's like an actor before an invisible audience, she thought. Just me and the page. I must take the past for granted. Not refer to it. But I must find out if he remembers. Again the number, and now an empty booth. She took the telephone, flurried, voice trembling. I must take long breaths, and his voice, quiet, tender, matter of fact. After ten years. Tea? Yes, she had just time for tea.

Oh, God, he still likes me enough to come. He doesn't hate me. He isn't angry at me. His voice was kind. I'll spend

the whole of the ten dollars. It's my birthday. I'll get a facial, and some white gloves, and my hair washed and curled. Oh, I'll be gay and fluffy and chatter. But I'll watch underneath to see if he likes me.

Always time, plenty of time, time to hang around and do nothing. A half an hour before five, always time to hang around and watch people. People passing, women passing, women walking . . . give up and live obscurely. There must be peace and happiness in that like the old peasant women who with clean, scrubbed faces come to the market square with two bunches of wilted stock and a few eggs, and passed by, passed by their pure clean eyes, their sweet, patient faces, and always passed by and on to the bold braggart town women hucksters . . . Why do they walk so queerly? They really ought to stop it, that woman walking as though a hinge in her spine suddenly jerked back her legs like a camel . . . that woman tilted in a hobble, the able uncouth slodging along athletic type. Now a beautiful walk, a lilt and a rise, a movement rising to a crest out in sea and receding just as calmly; never the breaking of the wave, the forward and backward pulsing up and swinging back, a beautiful walk, on a young and beautiful girl. And what clothes, million dollar simple clothes. Why shouldn't everything come to her? If I had just seen her feet and her legs and hips, only looked up to her waist I would have recognized the beauty of her, her right to homage and love and wealth even without looking higher. She is right. Nature's noblewoman, nature's princess, and eugenic selection by a procession of fat, paunchy men with hard eyes, puffy noses out of young girls like her, and that produces a beautiful walk. And now I must walk, and how will I walk? Will I walk in beauty, though beauty unadorns me? Oh, unadorned one, why wilt thou look for beauty, why wilt thou seek for love, and love fulfilled, seek love and love fulfilled again, and here

is the entrance to the hotel. And walk in with an eager light rush, and face alight.

And face alight, and lagging modestly, and saying barely nothing she met her sailor home from the seas. You won't like me in land clothes, he had said, fearing. That was a long time ago, a long time ago. How handsome in land clothes, how precariously perfect the set of his shoulders, his slim legs, his slightly lean, slightly full hips moving smoothly . . .

The sweetness of the little ceremonies of homage, the sweetness of having a chair pushed out for you, of beautiful, sleek shining haired waiters and bus boys and captains making a fuss over you. The sweetness of the solicitude in the face opposite, the manly face, and the graying hair, the handsome face, all bent in solicitude. The sweet fuss, the preening female, suddenly lovely. Will she have tea, or? Orange pekoe, or China or Russia or Ceylon, all you far away strange countries drenched in humid sun, women coughing their lungs out in tea dust, eating a little rice and black sauce, so that I may play with their tea, their life's essence. Is it orange pekoe or China? China, oh China, more than delicate, the soul of love itself, the emotions wafting into perfume, China tea definitely sensuous, not the retreating uncertain fragrances of orange pekoe, and who ever saw the orange flowers. China tea and a precious bit of toast in a silver salver domed by a silver bell. A bit of toasted bread and a swash of tea, and the lovely ceremony of tea, tea and Viennese swooning waltzes, tea and a man's voice and yours become feminine and thin and sweet like a bell so that you yourself fall in love with it. See yourself, little girl becoming wrinkled woman, see yourself for the last time, oh much beloved, oh much desired, play at being lovely and beloved, and handle cup delicately. Beautiful tea and crisp swimming

in butter toast, but not to be entered into with real relish, to be toyed with from afar . . . the accompaniments of what . . . of the play of the tea ceremony. What words were said she did not remember, only not to speak of the past, never to answer the question in his eyes. And he will never know what happened and why, and do I truly know what happened and why it is now like this, fencing and sweet conversation about nothing and no more to be touched on what happened and the sweet before. And the music playing on and on, the sweet melting music, saying something nothing like our words, the heart turned to a lot of palpitating swushy oozing, the trembling insides under the black dress never to tell, and never to answer the question in the sweet grave asking eyes. That, my dear sir, was long, long ago, and long long ago it was for you too, and I will not play at it with you. That shall hold itself close in me, like you said to me that night, the tender taking me from you. It will be like a book closed in covers of gold, you said. It is closed in covers of gold. For you one book. For me another. And I shall not open it. Only look at it, and stroke the golden covers to warm me on my birthday.

"It is my birthday," she smiled at him. "And this is my birthday present."

"Won't you let me give you many more such presents?" he smiled.

No more of these presents, she said to herself, for now, she observed, as the music ceased and the room suddenly grew long and vast and bare, and the now aggressive waiters rushed about placing dinner cards, now it is time to go home, and the playing is over. The playing is over, and there in the darkening house is what really is me and mine. That is the

truth, she said, the narrow lonesome loving truth. And so I must put you by, you and the sweet playing within your arms, she said to herself as the atmosphere in the taxi became too heavy with the questions he had never asked and she would never answer. Never, and the whole body retreating from a touch of the sleeve, the shoulder moving irresistibly toward hers in the sweet drugging atmosphere of the unanswered question. Ah, yes, he does like me. He does like me. Why must my life be so miserable that I cannot even have this. So comes the parting and words conventionally achieved. And now the dark doorway, the sluttish governess by the day, who is neither governess nor nurse nor decent cook, and the core of her life.

Now we will wash you, sweetheart, and then the story. And let's have supper. Honey, I forgot to buy supper. Aren't I a foolish? Mummy forgot to buy supper, oh isn't that a joke, sweet? But I had to work late and all, and I forgot to buy supper. And it's my birthday, honey, so let's have a party, a sandwich party in bed, won't that be fun? Just us two, and I'll make the sandwiches right now. There's a can of sardines, and bread and tomatoes. Bring a plate for you and one for me, the big ones. Now, and a whole uncut tomato for each. We'll eat it with our hands, just the way we like it. And a little salt. And now let's take them to bed, because it's so cold and dark in the living room. And we'll snuggle together, because it's my birthday party, two of us warm and cosy in my bed, and two candles on the night table and the tray between us. A regular party, honey. Where did we leave off, oh yes, where the oyster went walking on the beach. Shall I make-up sing his song. honey? So she sang. It was so easy to make up songs, thank God for that. It was so easy to make up pretty songs, beautiful sounds just like the beautiful words, just fitting

the beautiful words, dipping down with the beautiful words that swung low, and rising up and trilling and twirling and scudding up along and down along and tit tatting along and holding long and still and high, all like the beautiful words that existed in themselves, the song that went on by itself and living by itself. And underneath the bass is rumbling, the bass is rumbling, apart from the singing mother and the listening child and the crumbly plates pinked up with tomato skins, the bass is rumbling, there is no mail, there is no word, there is no knock at the door. There will never be a knock at the door, and the mail you are waiting for will never come, and the friendly knock at the door, that knock will never come, never, never, never, and the oyster says never, never, never, and the little girl will only have your thin kind of mother love. What is this mother love, this starved thin stuff all on top? I am not sharing your eager love for Alice, darling, I am far off from you and always I will be far off from you. I am not living with you and making your life rich and easy and swinging heavy and swinging high and low with a shared love and a shared life. I am just mechanically keeping up with you, oh flushed and roundly opened eyes, and it will always be like this. I can only give you a thin and removed preoccupation. Preoccupation, what an ugly plain word, like a long stringing out old maid. And who wants to be an old maid and long stringing out, and no letter came and he must know it is my birthday, and Christmas there was not even a ten cent doll for my darling, and this is the real life and the real love and the real portion. Neatly sliced off for you, my dear, neatly cut off, thus. Wait and wait, your heart tearing like old rubber every hour. Wait for the mail and wait for the friends, but every morning there's the office at nine, and after all, you have had a birthday party. And you mustn't let down on the job and the job lies or you're a goner,

and so is everybody else. Do you really want the song over again, darling? I didn't make such a funny song, this time, did I? Swing high and lush the branches of your soul, swing high, oh Alice and Mr. Oyster, don't forget . . . what fun we are having, darling! Wasn't this a grand birthday, darling? Now let's put out the light and hold hands and sleep together for a party. For my birthday.

THE QUARREL

by

Leo L. Ward

With a rusty tin full of coal oil in one hand and a clump of greasy rag in the other, he kicked at the screen door until it became dislodged from the jamb, and then edged his way out. The door slapped behind him and the released spring whirred for a moment or two as the old man shuffled away from the back porch, his face bent and frowning over the cup of coal oil that kept spilling upon his hand at almost every step.

He went over the lawn in a kind of scurrying half-run, passed through the dappled shade of the maple tree, then across the narrow dirt drive and on toward a clump of burdock in a corner of the small farmyard. He set the cup on the ground, then began tugging and jerking at the handles of a plow that was half hidden among the weeds. He stood for a moment frowning at the plow and muttering to himself. Then he bent over painfully and began splashing the rusty share with the oil.

Little specks of brightness appeared here and there on the share as Nate Heming rubbed at it steadily. But the old man's brow was moist now, and a filmy, misty blur was gathering just before the gray lashes of his eyes, so that he could hardly see the brightness coming on the share. Suddenly dropping the stub of corn cob with which he had been rubbing at the rust,

he lifted his body painfully and stood for a while shaking his head at the share and grumbling unintelligibly to himself. He rubbed the back of a greasy hand across his eyes and the little bright spots on the share suddenly began winking up at him.

"I . . . I can't scour the thing," he said. "I won't scour it."

Suddenly his head jerked backward angrily. A dense flock of blackbirds was passing over the barn. They swooped downward into the pasture with a great whirring of wings. Their raucous chattering ceased abruptly.

"Now look at that," the old man almost shouted, his shrunken face growing taut with lines of violent anger. "I'll tell you, I'm goin' to put an end to that."

He hurried away to the house, then in a little while returned, holding a single barrelled shotgun crosswise before him. He stole around the corner of the barn, and a minute later the sound of a shot came from the pasture. A harsh din arose as the birds, lifting in a black cloud, went off northward over the fields in swift, trailing flight. Then Nate Heming came back from the pasture, tramping heavily through the farmlot, the gun over his shoulder, his face flushed but relieved.

He was half way to the house when a woman burst out of the screen door on the rear porch and came toward him with long, rapid strides.

"Now what *are* you doin'?? Don't try to fool me, Nate Heming. I heared you shootin' out there." The woman had planted her large body directly in front of Nate and her great jaws worked heavily while she talked.

Nate looked at the woman but said nothing.

"What you doin' with that gun, I said."

"Been shootin' blackbirds. That's what I been doin', ef you want to know so bad."

"Give me that gun."

The woman snatched the gun out of Nate's hands, then pointed a brown arm toward the half scoured plow over beside the fence.

"Now you git over at that plow, Nate Heming. Just like I told you this morning . . . You ought to been in that tater field an hour ago. Lord knows, you've had time to git a dozen plows scoured."

Nate put one hand in his pocket, turned casually and started toward the plow. The woman stood watching while he moved away, her face squinted into a fixed, dry smile.

Half way to the plow the old man turned abruptly about, shook his fist violently at the woman and shouted, "I tell you, Sadie Heming, you ain't goin' to give me no dog's life this way. I . . . I'm not goin' to be worked to death. You just don't know what you're doin', you don't. You're just drivin' me right to my grave, that's what you're doin', Sadie Heming." The old man turned toward the plow again as he spoke of going to his grave, and his voice grew suddenly low and husky.

The big woman turned and went slowly toward the house, carrying the gun awkwardly at her side. But as she was crossing the dirt drive between farm lot and the lawn she stopped and looked back. Nate was standing beside the plow, a corn cob in his hand, glaring at her. A grimace of disgust spread over Sadie Heming's face.

"Er you goin' to plow that tater field this afternoon or not?" she asked, lifting her voice to suit the distance.

Nate flung the corn cob into the burdock beside the fence. "No," he said abruptly. Then he spoke slowly and deliberately. "I guess I won't plow that tater field."

Mrs. Nate Heming went over to the maple tree and leaned the gun against it, then returned rapidly across the farm lot.

She stooped and picked up the can of coal oil and a corn cob, then rose and stood facing Nate, her mouth drawn tight over her teeth and her eyes flashing. "All right," she said in a low but unsteady voice. "You don't need to. *I'm goin' to scour this plow, Nate Heming, and I'm goin' to plow that tater field. You don't need to.*"

Nate gulped audibly before he said, "Just you go ahead and try it. Just go right on an' try it, old woman." A thin smile pulled at the corners of his mouth and his whole body trembled slightly as he burst, first into a low, wheezy chuckle, then into a dry laugh. "I jess sees you a-plowin' that tater field. You'll learn, you'll learn what kind a work I have to do around here . . . An' it won't be like fussin' inside a house all day, neither."

Mrs. Sadie Heming jerked her head back and looked straight into Nate's flashing eyes as she said, "Yes, an' I'll tell you what *you'll* do. You go right up to the house and do the churnin'. *You just fuss* around the house onct and see how you like it. Yes, just march right on up there. The churn's ready, the cream's in it, an' ever'thing. An' see you don't stop till the butter comes, neither . . . An' then, Mister Heming, when the churnin's done you can start on them taters, cuttin' 'em up. They're right there on the porch, in the sack. And besides, you can milk the cow this evenin' too, when you git the taters done . . . Yes, an' ther's suthin' else you kin do. You can git yer own supper this evenin' . . . ef you expect to git any. Just like to see you gettin' yer own meals onct. So, just go right on. Start to *fussin'* around in the house, as you call it. The churn's all ready fer you."

Nate stood glaring petulantly at his wife, with a sickly grin playing about the corners of his mouth. At last he turned without saying anything, and started for the house.

And scarcely a half-hour later Sadie Heming went out of the farmplot, following an old gray team and a plow that scudded on the ground before her, raising little puffs of dust about her long swinging skirts.

It was not yet mid-afternoon when Nate burst open the screen door on the back porch and went stumbling and limping in a kind of headlong run across the farm lot toward the little dirt lane that led past a small flaring corn crib and a low hog house to the "tater" field. He could see a gray team moving slowly in the field, and behind the team the tall figure of his wife bending far forward over the handles of the plow. He went straight toward the team, lurching and jerking his body through the loose plowed soil.

"You git in out a here," he cried, almost in a whine, as he approached the plow. "I'm goin' to plow my tater field myself. You . . . you git in out a here."

As the woman looked with some surprise at Nate a broad grin spread slowly about her eyes and mouth. She tossed her head upward and laughed, and the faded blue sunbonnet fell far back on her thick grayish hair.

"Why, I thought you was goin' to do the churnin'," she said, and then laughed again.

"You do yer own churnin'," Nate shouted, "that's what you do, an' leave me alone. I ain't goin' to do yer churnin' fer you. I ain't goin' to do no slavin' fer you, Sadie Heming."

The woman slowly pulled the lines from over her head. "Awright, aww—right," she said almost good humoredly, "just as you say, Mister Heming. Go right ahead an' plow it then, since I see you don't like the fussin' around the house so well." Her voice rose, slightly shrill and thin with irony. Then

she stepped over onto the plowed ground and stood with one arm akimbo.

The old man's hands shook as he reached for the plow. He was standing in the furrow now, violently jerking and slapping the horses with both lines. As the team moved away he grasped the plow handles fiercely and stumbled on, staring intently at the curling loam beneath him. Once, as he went slowly up the field, he looked backward over his shoulder for an instant, then turned to fix his eyes again on the plow.

When he at last came to the turn of the land much of the anger had left his face. He breathed more freely and easily now. His hands no longer shook so violently. He looked back over the field. The woman was gone—he could see her in the lane, half way to the house already. His eyes fell to the strip of plowed land beside him, and he examined it carefully. Wisps of grass and dried weed stalks showed here and there at the edges of the furrows. "Ughh . . . look a that. Fine job a plowin' *she* did . . . Well, I knowed it. I knowed just what *she'd* do."

Sadie Heming could hardly see the "eyes" of the potatoes now, in the dusk that was creeping out of the little orchard and gathering slowly around the house. She examined each potato closely before cutting it into sections and dropping them in the pan at her feet. From time to time she looked toward the barn, then gazed uneasily down the lane toward the potato field. Her face was drawn and anxious, but no longer harsh.

At last she poured the potatoes into an empty gunny sack and went out from the porch with a large milk bucket swinging at her side. When she returned, not long afterward, from the direction of the barn milk froth was spilling over the brim of the bucket onto her dress and her big loose shoes. She

stopped for a moment with her hand resting on the little white knob on the screen, and looked again in the direction of the lane before going into the house.

She lit a small oil lamp and set it in its high bracket beside the kitchen window. She set the white oilcloth table with two big blue-rimmed plates, two large glass tumblers, a pitcher of milk, a plate of bread, the pink salt and pepper shakers, the little blue glass full of tooth picks. Then she put the meat and fried potatoes in the "warming oven."

She took her sunbonnet from the back of a chair and suddenly left the kitchen, and the screen door slammed sharply behind her as she walked swiftly toward the little lane leading to the field.

There was still light enough for her to see the horses moving in the field. She walked toward the team, striding heavily through the loose plowed ground, her skirts dragging in the black soil.

"Now Nate, you better come in out a here," she said as she came up to the plow. "There's no use you stayin' out here all hours like this." The horses suddenly stopped at the sound of her voice, but the driver started to shout at them and to slap their rumps sharply with the lines. The team stood still, however, their heads drooped low over the furrow in front of them.

The woman raised her voice a little higher. "You know you ought to been in out a here an hour ago. Now come on. Onbitch them horses and come on in an' git some supper. You ought to be ashamed a this here stubbornness, Nate."

Nate Heming kept staring straight ahead at his team, paying no attention to the woman standing beside the plow. He continued to slap the horses and to shout more and more loudly. His

shouting was becoming almost unintelligible, hardly more than a sustained howling and bawling.

At last one of the horses lifted its head and started to move, then the other moved forward also. The jerking and slapping and shouting continued.

Sadie Heming turned to the team and ran up along their side, calling to them to stop. "Whoa . . . whoaa . . . whoaaa . . ." She was almost screaming. The horses moved on, very slowly at first, but as the noise behind them increased they went faster, then faster and faster until the plow went forward so rapidly that the driver was forced into a half trot in the furrow behind it. The mingled screaming and shouting followed the team rod after rod up the field.

But at the corner of the land, where the team was swinging at the turn, the woman hurried forward and grasped a bridle rein. One of the horses, then the other came to a full stop, and a few moments afterward they were both drooping their heads over the furrow as before. Gradually the shouting behind the plow lessened, and finally Nate Heming stood, mute with anger, staring at the woman.

"Now you just stop this craziness, Nate Heming," Sadie said when she had got back her breath from the running. "Just you come on in out a here, d'ya understand? Don't be stubborn like this, Nate." Her voice was suddenly not so high or harsh. "You'll make yourself sick at this kind a work."

The old man still gripped the handles of the plow. He was no longer glaring at the woman. He was looking straight ahead at the horses. He was crying.

The woman moved around to the doubletree and began to unhitch the tugs. Suddenly the old man pulled the lines from around his neck and violently flung them over the plow toward his wife. The buckle struck her cheek, stinging her sharply.

Her hand went quickly to her face but she said nothing. She went on with the unhitching.

A few minutes later she was driving the team into the lane that led, now through a deep dusk, toward the house. Once as she went along she thought she could hear Nate's voice, lifted wild and angry behind her. She listened anxiously, but the jangling of the tug chains came clear and sharp in the damp dusk and she could not be sure what he said.

She put the horses in the barn, unharnessed them and fed them. As she came out of the door she saw Nate's figure standing at the corner of the barn. "Ever'thing's done now, Nate. You better come on up to supper." Her voice was quiet and gentle as she spoke. The dark figure at the corner of the barn did not answer.

Halfway to the house she heard a heavy thud behind her, then the jangle of chains. She knew he was rearranging the harness on its wooden pegs. She smiled faintly to herself as she walked on.

In the kitchen she took down the oil lamp from its bracket on the wall and set it on the table, then removed the meat and potatoes from the warming oven. She poured the greasy salt ham onto a white platter and the fried potatoes into a clay colored bowl and set these on the table. Then she stood waiting over beside the window, her face tired and anxious but no longer taut or hard as it had been before.

She had waited for a long time beside the window when the spring on the screen door creaked and someone shuffled across the floor of the back porch. Then Nate appeared in the kitchen door. His face, grimaced against the light, looked very weary and very old. His squinted eyes flickered once or twice as he stared at his wife, and a slight petulant quivering ran along the gray line of his lips. He glanced once at the table,

then his eyes lifted again to the woman's face. "Supper's ready, Nate," Sadie Heming said, very quietly, pointing to the table.

"Awright," he said. His lower jaw was shaking violently as he spoke. "You better eat it yourself then. I don't want none a *your* supper." And he went, swaying, almost headlong through the low door that opened into the unlighted bedroom beyond the kitchen.

Sadie Heming ate very little, some bread and some milk and a few slices of fried potato. Then she cleared the table as noiselessly as possible, but little clinkings and clatterings arose whenever she set a dish away in the cupboard. At every slight noise of the dishes fresh lines would run out from the corner of her mouth, forming tiny pinkish webs under the wips of grayish hair that had fallen down her cheeks.

When the dishes were done she went out to the porch and returned with a dish pan filled with potatoes which were covered with little white and purplish sprouts. She sat down beside the table and began cutting the potatoes with a small paring knife. Once in a while she would look toward the bedroom. She could see the corner of the great double bed, just visible in the dim light, that fell through the open door from the lamp on the table beside her. She heard sounds from the other room now and again . . . the quiet slap of a suspender falling against a trouser leg, the hard clap of a shoe upon the floor, the crackle of soil-caked overalls flung over a chair . . . then the creak of a bed slat . . . The cutting of the potatoes went on again, steadily, and there was no sound now except the lisp of the knife cutting through the soft flesh of the potatoes.

A loud heavy breathing came from the bedroom. It grew very loud and very slow, the labored breathing of a tired, exhausted body. The woman stopped the cutting, with half of a large potato held before her in her hand. She cut it in two

pieces, then dropped these in the pan. She put the knife on the table beside her and let her hands fall in the hollow of her lap, then sat for a long while listening to the heavy breathing in the other room. At last she rose suddenly and impulsively from her chair and went quickly over to the door where she stood gazing into the darkened room. Her head was dropped slightly forward and she seemed to be looking down at the bed dimly showing in the light that fell over her stooping shoulder from the high lamp on the kitchen wall behind her. Once or twice her shoulders and her head shook convulsively but slightly, as though she was crying. After some time she turned slowly from the door and came back to the chair, where she sat down and with fumbling fingers took off her heavy shoes. She went very quietly back to the door again, but stopped there as before. For a long while she stood gazing into the half-dark, of the farther room. Her shoulders no longer trembled. She seemed very quiet now. Finally her hand began playing idly with the fastening of her dress, and she moved as if to go through the door. Then she turned abruptly and came back toward the lamp in its high bracket against the kitchen wall. As she reached up for the lamp her broad, rough face showed wet and shiny against the light, and the line of her tight narrow lips was broken and softened in a faint smile. She blew the light out, and went through the sudden darkness of the kitchen toward the heavy breathing in the other room.

FILM FRAGMENT

by

Oliver Gossman

Where the track dipped to a ford the nocturnal plain, said Mary, simply opened a hand and closed it again as one might trap a fly. The silence, pierced by a shot, healed instantaneously. The oblivious stars looked down into the blind gaze of two eyes which stared up and were oblivious of them. A horse drawing up among the trees above the stream threw forward its head and whinnied. The young moon, believing herself alone, queened it supreme in the eastern skies. At that moment, some five or six miles away, Mary was born and her mother died.

As she danced against the trellis background of the cabaret stage, the strong light, her dark eyelashes and her bleached hair gave her an ethereal look. In spite of the asides which were intended to spice the songs she sang in this character she did look like a young and innocent girl. This gave rise to the obvious reservation with regard to the meretricious fascination of all beautiful soubrettes. And it is true, when she returned to the alcove after each brief performance she appeared suddenly to age. She smoked cigarettes and drank wine and when she looked over the brim of her glass her friendly grey eyes showed a curiously engaging candour above the clearest depths of disgraceful understanding. She wore short skirts and

a low bodice. Putting her head to one side with a critical air she extended a long beautiful leg, regarded the arched foot that had once promised her something of a life but now barely won her the tenth of her living, and remarked of herself: "I guess this cut flower's beginning to wither."

Her young father, she found occasion to continue, had set out to ride for the nearest doctor. Her mother, a prey to the profound agitation of the supreme hour, allowed her physical terrors to communicate themselves to the spirit until the incipient delirium had filled her mind with formless premonitions and an unaccountable dread. Mary, with her characteristic "Christ's sake, kid," originated the assertion that the pregnant woman, in the darkening intensity of mortal panic identified herself, her child and her man as one indivisible love and destiny. She was not observed to rise from the bed and go to the window where she was presently found prostrate. The plain was a featureless expanse of shadow thinly covered with a luminous mist. The sky was spread with stars, the white shoulders of the virginal moon emerged from the dusk of the horizon. No living thing could she discern, yet from the time he had been gone the young wife knew that her husband still moved invisible within the scope of her vision. She called out his name once and fell to the ground. Her mother saw — said Mary — with the eyes of a mother, with animal instinct for danger, the uncanny devination of the snake's presence in the grass. At the moment when she called out be sure a false bird note travelled up the shallow ravine and rifles were cocked. It may even be that Mary uttered her first cry almost simultaneously as her father uttered his last.

Her interlacing narrative, the recurrent vision of her as she fled to the stage and spread her wings and danced again

her bizarre interludes, the music, the general medley of that variegated leisurely gaiety for which the Viennese temperament is supposed to possess a special genius: these, inextricably confused, formed a bewildering composite not unlike the futurist canvasses with their unintelligible bric-a-brac and debris of passionate perception, their effect of devastation, their hint of madness, and their alluring sense of beauty deliberately dismembered. The walls were covered with a tapestry to which wine stains and tobacco smoke and the hot breath of the licentious night had imparted in a single season a counterfeit fragrance of old memories. The design depicted conventional scenes. The minstrel with his lute, the hunter with his horn, the groups of stately ladies, the clusters of dancing children, all sustained a fading existence in a world of dingy roses. The place was called the Rosen Cabaret and was full of such roses, of which Mary, in relation to the freshness of her narrative, evidently counted herself one.

The old Indian serving-woman heard the distress of her mistress and assisted by Mary's aunt she lifted the stricken woman back into the narrow bed where she was later delivered of a child and her own soul almost together, as perhaps they were one and the same. There is an aloe which thus blossoms once and dies. Mary was accessible to such things. To these also she presented her wary smile and cocked an alert grey eye charged with the lifelong experience of her nineteen years. She had the gift of familiarity and her heart, which had persisted pure, was instinct with the perfect charity of complete disillusion. She spoke of her mother as of a person much younger than herself. "I guess," she said, "my mammy was a pretty tender slip of a girl." She recounted how her father's body had been brought back that night to the estancia. It was a singular

business. Both parents were dead, the babe was scarce alive. The house and its sudden and several calamities were left entirely on the hands of strangers: of the aunt, of the native woman, of a few rough men vowing themselves to justice, having all their simple lives made a habit of vengeance. The Indian matron, having in her bones the discipline of a calamitous tradition, tranquilly assumed the vicarage of Providence. At her breast the new life received a maternal welcome. Mary, so cast upon the world, so sought with indiscriminating lips a fount of the general mother earth.

But in the same breath, it seemed, Mary was already speaking of the ferry. It was beginning to rain, she said. Out of the molten sky fell preternaturally large raindrops like little globules of lead flattening themselves into star shapes on impact with the jetty steps and hissing fugitively as they pierced the dead waters of the bay. Mary strayed inquisitively to the brink or was lost behind bales of wool, donkey-cranes, or stacks of miscellaneous merchandise. For twenty hours she had been lugged and tugged and reprimanded. Thrust asleep and shaken awake, scolded for lingering and chidden for impatience, by an aunt wearied and unduly excited by the fuss of a departure not at all clear in its aim: Mary had set out, it was evident, in the footsteps of the Babes in the Wood. The stale light of this unsympathetic morning added to the discomfort of her hands and face, which did not trouble her so much because they were dirty as because they were sticky with the traces of an unhappy sleep and of childish griefs still imminent. She had cried much: but under an influence of sadness inspired by the tears of her Indian foster mother only a little more than by the dew on the flowers of the verandah and the general undoing of that abrupt farewell. The ferry-boat arrived, was laden and departed. Mary,

who beheld the sea for the first time, found herself suddenly detached from the edge of the known world and, alarmed that something terrible was about to happen to them all, began to whimper and then to wail. The rain thickened, now bearing obliquely. The steam ferry, heaving latterly to the rhythm of a gentle swell, ultimately carried Mary in silence and through transports of breathless fear to a crowded pier, a still more crowded thoroughfare, a populous and furious city which, more terrible than the sea, engulfed her. Days and nights succeeded one another and her aunt remained with her. Then of a morning she woke to none but strangers, quiet and peremptory people who had apportioned among themselves spurious titles of aunt and uncle. Too astonished to speak, too astonished at first even to cry, she became taciturn. They made a practice of beating her but she persisted obdurate and taciturn.

And from this chrysalis came forth no butterfly that might take naturally to the sunlight and inherit the flowers, but a moth which, also inevitably driven to the light and an aim, haunted the nimbus of the lamp and importuned the flame. So she appeared as she danced. In a moment she had fled again and up there she regained her ethereal look. She danced here with indifferent art and obvious artifice. She displayed her legs, her shoulders and the cleft of an immature bosom, which was all that was meanwhile expected of her. Momentarily she achieved a certain sinister ecstasy indistinguishable as the flicker of gaiety or the awful levity of extreme torment. The stage was restricted, all the evolutions of her absurd dance were therefore not locomotive but practically stationary. It was impossible to dismiss the first impression mystically created, the complex fascination of a focus baffled by this apparition which was neither a gesture of joy nor a posture of horror. Mary herself, with her genial

and accommodating nature, her charming character so neighbourly, so neutral, so sane, did in effect afford a fair field and no favour to speculation, which found itself childish before the serene enigma of her destiny. With arms outstretched and head thrown back she framed herself, a slender figure, on the tree of an invisible crucifix. As she rose to her toes she seemed to prepare her feet to be transfixed by the nails.

A CASUAL INCIDENT

by

James T. Farrell

The kid stood at the edge of the small nondescript crowd, and listened to the Come-to-Jesus meeting. It was conducted by a sleek Greek. The fellow was a good showman, and furnished presentable female converts to stand up on the soap box and give testimony. One of them was a mother, and after her own recital, she put her seven-year-old up, because the child had been living with Jesus inside of her for over two years. The mother and the Greek tenderly told the little girl to explain to the people just how Jesus had come to her, as quick as a snap of the fingers, and just how nice and good and holy and happy it felt when you had the Savior of the world right inside of your breast. The child stood on the soap box, and she said nothing. She fidgeted, and dropped her eyes. The crowd laughed good-humoredly at her cute gestures. She did not utter a word, and the Greek lifted her down. He said that anyway, she loved Jesus, and loving Jesus was all that counted in this world.

Jesus got tongue-tied that time, the kid said to a burly Polack on his right.

The stolid Pole pursed his lips.

Hey all queer here, answered the Pole.

Yeh it's funny all right. Jesus got tongue-tied that time, responded the kid.

Yeh, said the Pole. He smiled.

I think it's funny. Here they say Jesus has been inside the kid for a couple of years, and then when they ask him to speak, he get's tongue-tied, the kid said.

Soon the meeting broke up, and the crowd dispersed. It was at the corner of State and Quincey, and a Saturday night crowd poured along State Street. The kid lingered and talked to the Pole. They leaned against the show window of an Owl Drug Store. It was jumbled and confusedly decorated and placarded. They talked. The Pole was a giant, with a heavy, planed face, and a deep bass voice. He had ox-eyes. He looked very masculine.

You know dese religious people, dey all a little queer in de head, said the Pole.

Yeh, they're nuts. But it was funny the way Jesus got tongue-tied, the kid said.

The kid was about twenty, with cleanly carved features. The Pole surveyed him.

Religious guys always like de ladies doh, said the Pole.

Yeh, they get themselves hooked up with a skirt everytime, said the kid.

I was in Seattle one time, and dey hadda big big place. It was a great big tent, and dere were crowds evry night. It was dat religion, what you callum? You know? Dat religion, oh gee, I know de name well. Dat religion, you know where dey all roll around, all crazy in de head?

Holy Rollers.

Yeh dat's it. De Holy Rollers.

Yeh, said the kid.

Dey had a big big tent, and so big uh place, and dey had big crowds evry night, and dey had all kindsa money too. Well de guy what was the preacher, he liked de wimin . . . you know what I mean, said the Pole.

The Pole smiled and pursed his lips. He described how the preacher had seduced the choir-master's wife, and several of the congregation. He finally eloped with the former, taking along the church funds. There had been a first page story. The kid saw no point to the account, but he listened because he didn't have anything else to do.

Wimin, dey all dangerous, said the Pole, pursing his lips.

He talked on. He spoke of his life. When he was twelve, he had run away from his native Polish village. He had followed the sea, going to all parts of the world, and had had adventures on many a water front.

When a young fellow goes on his own, tings happen to him. You know . . . well tings happen to him, the Pole said.

Yeh, I know, the kid answered.

A young fellah goes on his own, and don't know nottin', an' well . . . tings happen to him, the Pole said.

Well you take your chances, and if you sink, you sink, the kid said.

Yeh, but tings happen, the Pole said.

The Pole described more of his experiences. Then, he said; I gotta nice place now wid a fren. We have nice big place, 'n' bring anyone we want dere. No one to bot-der us.

That's pretty nice. You can bring yere women there, the kid said.

Wimin . . . No! . . . Dere dangerous, the Pole said.

He pursed his lips.

Yes, I guess they do get to be a nuisance, the kid said.

Where you live? . . . at home?

No I live in an undertaking parlor, said the kid.

The Pole laughed and said that was funny. The kid explained that he received three dollars a week, and a bed, for hanging around in the evening, answering telephone calls, and minding the shop, when the other fellows went out on ambulance calls. This was his evening off. The Pole laughed, pursed his lips, and exclaimed that it was funny.

You bring girls dere too? the Pole asked.

Hell no! There's six shanty Irishmen around, and the girls would be raped sure as hell, the kid said.

The Pole laughed and said that women were dangerous.

There was a pause in the conversation. The kid watched the sleepy-faced people parade down State Street.

Wanna see my place? asked the Pole.

Not to-night thanks, I feel pretty tired, the kid said.

The Pole was confused. To mask his confusion, he hurriedly asked the kid about the books he had under his arm. The kid casually answered that they were story books. The Pole talked of the sea. He asked the kid if he had ever been on the road. The kid had. He talked of the beer in Hoboken.

Tings happen to young fellahs, the Pole said.

Yeh, the kid yawned.

You out lookin' fur girls? asked the Pole.

Not particularly. I feel pretty tired, the kid said.

I was just wondering, the Pole said, shrugging his husky shoulders.

The Pole pursed his lips.

I don't go for can houses, the kid said.

A young fellah gotta have his girls, the Pole said.

Yes, I guess he does, the kid said.

The kid yawned, and said that he was pretty tired, and he guessed that he'd go back to the undertaking parlor.

‘Come up an’ see my place, the Pole said.

No thanks, I feel pretty tired.

The Pole laughed. He told the kid that any time he was broke and needed a place to sleep, or a meal, to see him. The Pole gave the kid his address, and repeated his offer to stake him anytime he needed it.

The Pole pursed his lips, and looked at the kid.

Come up and see my place, he said, his expression one of emotional strain.

I feel too tired . . . say there’s a saloon called Reilley’s on Fourteenth Street in Hoboken, right off the ferry. Ever been there? asked the kid.

The Pole eyed the kid queerly, and said that he had. He talked of the beer, fifteen cents a glass with the headache guaranteed.

The Pole said he guessed he’d leave. He continued talking. I guess I’ll blow this damn town soon, the kid said.

Chicago is a nice town. Lottsa girls here, the Pole said. He pursed his lips.

Nice girls are everywhere. They grow on trees, the kid said.

The Pole pursed his lips, laughed, and said that girls were dangerous.

Girls dat are are nice, sometime dey give you, you know . . a dose, the Pole said.

Well you take your chances, the kid said.

Yeh, but dere’s a way ob not taking chances, the Pole said. His voice was a trifle tense.

What do you think of Cleveland? the kid asked.

They discussed Cleveland, but the Pole was not interested.

You got a nice girl ob yere own? he asked.

No, I don’t believe in nuisances, the kid said.

You like de girrulls?

Yeh, sometimes.

To-night?

No.

You goin' back to de undertaker's and read?

Yeh!

Oh gee! Ain't it spooky. Hah! Hah!

He pursed his lips, and his ox-eyes were concentrated intensely upon the kid.

I gotta nice place. You come up.

I'm pretty busy. I'm writing a book, the kid said.

Oh, about the girls?

Not particularly, the kid said.

It must be nice, the Pole said.

He told the kid to visit him, and he'd tell him all about his experiences. The kid could then write a book about geisha girls, and Asiatic beachcombers, and all that sort of thing.

I'm pretty tired. I guess I'll go, the kid said.

Got my address?

Yeh, but I'm pretty busy, the kid said.

But ain't it spooky out dere wid de corpses?

I don't mind it, the kid said.

It's funny, the Pole said. He laughed.

Yeh, I guess I'll go, the kid said.

Dat's funny. Livin' at de undertakers.

It's better than sleeping in parks, the kid said.

You sure you wouldn't like tuh come up tuh my place a little while? the Pole asked, pursing his lips.

No thanks, the kid answered. He yawned.

Sure?

Yeh, I'm sure.

But you gotta be careful ob girls. Dere dangerous, the Pole said.

Yeh, the kid said; he yawned that he was going.
Well come 'n' visit me some time, the Pole said.
So long, the kid said.

So long kid . .

I'm goin' to the I. C. Station at Van Buren Street.

Well so long kid . . . but I gotta nice place.

THE HISTORY INSTRUCTOR

by

Hjalmar Soederberg

Dusk is here early; it is the dusk of winter. It is dinner hour in the café lounge. A wet snow is falling and it rains. One angular, black silhouette after another glides by in the turbulent haste of the dinner hour, just as, long ago, the fantastic figures in the homemade shadow-pictures of the nursery were passed back and forth over a piece of oiled paper by an unseen hand.

There *he* goes. How old he's getting lately.

There *he* is; how long will he be able to keep things going?

And there *she* goes . . . Has she really taken the trouble to make up her face on a day like this?

. . . Just now my old history teacher passed, white-haired, slender and stooped. I suppose he's been pensioned, long ago. How threadbare and dilapidated he looks. When I saw him glide past the window with crooked knees and bent back I seemed to feel my own body, as though affected by a mysterious sympathy, nearly collapse as a knife sinks into its shaft.

My old history teacher . . . What a deep and respectful veneration he inspired in me when I first came to school as a little fellow and saw his kind, handsome white head — for it was white even then — and my astonishment, mixed with contempt, when after several years I climbed to the upper classes, classes which he taught, and saw him at close range.

There wasn't another teacher in the whole school we dared jest with as wantonly and insolently as with him.

How had things reached that pass?

Really, they seemed always to have been like that.

Quite likely he had realized from the beginning his inability to inspire fear; and so he wished to compensate by making himself liked the more. As a means to this he tried to make his teaching periods as amusing and entertaining as possible. He paid little or no attention to the lessons; he told stories, drew caricatures of popes and emperors on the blackboard, and gave pantomime representations of history's most dramatic incidents. He wanted us to laugh and we did laugh. His lectures became continuous paroxysms of laughter. But we laughed, not at his witticisms, for they were understood by only a few, but at his own ridiculousness. Instead of being our chastiser, he became our court fool. No jest was too insolent when he was the butt. We carried up large supplies of burdock burrs to the classroom and turned the lecture period into a battle. It did no good that the old man begged us in most moving terms not at least to throw them at him, for the funniest and most thrilling thing to do was just that — particularly to hit his hair . . . And one day, during the morning recess, after it had become known that the old bachelor intended to marry, we composed a speech of congratulation in the most wretched Latin, containing several positively indecent pieces of advice concerning entrance to matrimony, and at the opening of the following history period this speech was read with a straight face by the prize scholar of the class . . .

Not even with the Greek instructor, who was deaf and nearly blind — not even with the absurd little probationary teacher would we have dared take such liberties.

And then, too, he was in financial difficulties and was frequently

sought in his classroom by persons of unpleasant appearance on urgent errands. An unfailing source of amusement was the old man's deadly terror whenever there was a knock at the door and the boy who stepped out to open it came back with the inevitable information:

"A gentleman to see you, sir."

Then one day — I remember it very clearly — it was a November day like this, with early dusk and sleet — during the history period there were two such visits, one close upon the other. Our amusement knew no limit, but the old man seemed downhearted. He made an attempt or two fall into his usual jesting mood, but without success. Things began to get dull; something entertaining had to be done.

All at once the prize scholar got up — no one had heard any knock — and stepped to the door for the third time. In a moment he was back, unshakably solemn:

"A gentleman to speak with you, sir."

Then he turned to us and winked. We understood immediately. Primus was a clever fellow the only one among us capable of such a bright idea.

"Good Lord!" cried the old man, and rushed out into the corridor, his coattails flapping about his legs.

Of course there was no one there.

But he was very pale when he came back. He made a vain attempt to continue the anecdote he had just begun. But his voice failed him. He sank down weakly in the yellow-stained armchair, and wept.

Things went to pieces; he saw ruin staring him in the face, and now this . . . He broke down. There was nothing to do but weep; and he wept.

— translated from the Swedish
by Egbert Swenson.

THE LOAN

by

Romer Wilson

"One thing is certain. There will be a financial revolution. These war loans will be cancelled, and we shall never see our money again."

"Nonsense," said Philip Stevenson, "you are a pessimist, old man."

"I am not a pessimist. Do you suppose that the State will allow itself to bear the burden of this disgusting war for ever? I tell you not fifty years hence there will be a financial rearrangement of colossal magnitude and many people will be ruined. It will be necessary. Ruin is not as bad as death, one can recover from it. Do you suppose the State will allow itself to be hampered with an old war debt to its subjects when it wants money to combat the increase in lunacy and to cradle the progeny of the working man? Our statesmen foresee this now but hope they will be dead before the catastrophe. We shall have enough to do to pay back our foreign borrowings, indemnities, and compensations. To do that, as likely as not, we shall have to go bankrupt."

Philip Stevenson fingered a little object in the secret pocket of his uniform where officers keep their treasures.

"Well," he said, "at any rate, it is the right thing to do, and I have done it."

"We may be dead before the smash," said Mr. Berkly.

"In all probability," said Captain Stevenson, "in all probability."

"I envy you," said Mr. Berkly, who had a humped back. "If I had not been born with this damnable hump, I might be killed by your side."

"Glory? Tired of life?" said Stevenson.

"Neither," said Mr. Berkly, "but the living feel lonely among so much dying."

"Shake it off," said Stevenson kindly, "shake it off! God will pull us through. I daresay we shall even survive a cancelled War Loan and see the old country up top yet."

"We may," reiterated Berkly, "survive a cancelled War Loan."

"It's a mad old notion of yours," said Stevenson looking at his half-hunter, "Where do you get 'em from?"

"Telepathy with His Majesty's government," said Berkly snappishly. "I tell you they are trying the confidence trick on us." The poor man had had this harassing idea immediately after obtaining about £10,000 worth of the new national commodity.

"Well," said Stevenson, "it was our duty and I subscribed. Don't be so fidgety about it. What point is there in thinking of these distressing futurities at the present moment?"

"There will be a revolution when it is discovered that the Government has cheated us."

"But it honestly believes — —!"

"Can it honestly believe? Can it, I ask you," said Berkly, striking the little table. "Can it, I ask you, honestly believe it can ever do anything but cancel a half of the reckless engagements it is forced to undertake?"

The waiter who, like a guardian angel, overhears all brought whiskies and soda and put them down before the guest and

went. Unfortunately for Stevenson, Berkly happened to be the host.

"You would therefore stop the war in order to spend no more stolen money." Stevenson whispered the heresy in a very low voice.

Berkly tapped him on the knee and said: "My good fellow, a few very good people, a few maniacs, and a few disappointed politicians are inclined that way, but for us sinners expediency is the only right. I myself have lost all interest in the national aspect of the struggle. I would get out of it on the first day that it seemed expedient so to do." Berkly paused, then continued: "It is a pity that we have to be humbugged by our Government. It shows how much value we attach to these things we shout about."

"Your sort of ideas will wreck the confidence of the nation. They are worthy of Keir Hardie." Stevenson looked again at his wrist watch and fidgeted in his belt pocket. "The Government is doing its best in a difficult situation."

Berkly flushed. "Did I accuse it of not doing so? I said one thing was certain. We shall never get our money back." He drank his whisky noisily, like a man who has hammered in a conviction.

"People would claw the Government if they believed that."

"Yes, because they will not see the Government's dilemma when they are enraged with the Government, then they will probably foresee that they have been misled."

"But the German blood is up. Can we stop now, I demand, can we?" Stevenson made the puerile demand heatedly, as if his own blood had risen with the Germans'.

"I won't discuss all that," said his host lightly. "Do not take it so to heart. After all, it is really nothing. There will

merely be a financial revolution before the fifties and possibly—if the masses suffer—a new constitution. I see possibilities, a totally new constitution with new ideals, new values, no fiddle-faddles like a state religion, no army, or anything of that sort. Yes, I see quite a lot of good ahead.”

Mr. Berkly rose with the aid of the stick, and together they went into the vestibule where Captain Stevenson collected a cane, gloves, and service cap, and the attendant, who ought to have been at the front, but wisely preferred security and sixpences to shot and shell, stuffed Mr. Berkly into a heavy box cloth coat with an astrakhan collar. They drove in a taxi to the Empire and Captain Stevenson kept incessantly putting the second and first finger (not counting the thumb) of his left hand into his little belt pocket. Mr. Berkly noticed it, but said nothing.

“The Government has a sore head,” said Mr. Berkly, half-way down Piccadilly.

“Oh, I don’t know,” said the Captain, who was not listening.

“One wonders where the immortal is who ought to be pulling us out of this mess.”

“*Arma virumque cano Deumque ex Machina*,” mumbled the Captain, who had learnt a little Latin from an advanced coach somewhere about his eighteenth year.

Berkly, who was a scholar, laughed. “Exactly,” he said, “but so far there has been little or nothing in the shape of a revolution.”

Stevenson stirred. “Well,” he said, “you’ve disturbed me damnably about that loan. I wish—” he stopped. “I was rather building on it.”

“Don’t worry,” said Berkly.

"I am fatalistic to-night," said the other as he got out of the taxi. "Sure I'm going to be —"

"One always is," said Berkly, "but the premonitions of three quarters of the world come to nothing."

They were in the foyer. Stevenson lit a cigarette and they found their seats. The revue had begun.

"Premonitions," said Stevenson, and fingered the little affair in his pocket again. "Oh, damn this revue!" He looked very agitated, kept turning from side to side, breathed through his nose, moved his hands, and rubbed their palms on the arms of his fauteuil, much to the annoyance of his neighbour, a woman who said nothing because he was an officer.

"Sit still!" said Berkly, "or shall we go out?"

"No. I'll control myself," said the Captain, and became immediately calm.

In the interval they went and had a drink, but being seated before the curtain rose, Stevenson felt again in his Lilliputian receptacle and brought out a square object a little smaller than a lady's visiting card. Berkly, whose curiosity exceeded his honour, and who had suffered considerably from the elbow of the captain's searching arm, saw that it was a photograph. It was held about the level of its owner's knee in its owner's palm with the thumb up to protect it from prying eyes who squinted at it obliquely. Mr. Berkly was not lucky enough to catch a glimpse of the features it represented.

The strains of a ragtime song swayed the air. Mr. Berkly felt stirred. He had got thoroughly roused at the club. "I feel stirred," he whispered to the Captain. "Do you believe in the prophets of old? How very charming! How charming!" He clapped for an encore. "We who survive. We who have to survive. You lucky dead." Stevenson winced. "You lucky dead.

We shall have to strip ourselves after this war and reform all our notions. Perhaps we shall see the death of nationality. Then we shall have a selection of laws instead of a beastly school of laws and heaven knows what besides."

"Let us hear this song," said the Captain, who felt a chill creep down his spine. "Let us hear this song." He leant forward and in his excitement his left hand stuck out towards Berkly with the photograph in it.

Berkly looked.

"You are not married?" said Berkly.

"No." The left hand was drawn in with a jerk. "I suppose I ought to be reproducing my species in the short time left to me upon this earth."

"Undoubtedly," said Berkly with a smile.

"I expect a lot love her," said Stevenson suddenly, all eyes for the magic woman on the stage.

"Her husband and others," said Berkly.

Stevenson looked down.

"It is damnably hard to die without speaking to her."

"Send her a present," said the other, "a diamond necklace or something absurd."

"Don't laugh, you ass, I am in hell. It's awful to fall in love at such a distance."

"You will be sure to think of your ideal as you expire. You will have the happiness of knowing love for an unblemished marvel."

"You disgusting cynic."

"I mean it as truly as the Christmas numbers," said Berkly pressing his arm. "Would a thousand be enough?"

"What?"

"Pounds."

"What for?"

"To play with."

"I will repay you, you good fellow—that's if."

"Bah, no! Be honestest than the government and cancel it now," said Berkly. "Do you want to stay any longer?"

"Yes, if you don't mind. I feel like a boy again. I shall blub. Thanks awfully, Berkly. I shall — — God, this is slosh!" The Captain concentrated his gaze and thought he held her glance a moment.

Possibly he did, because his mind was very concentrated.

OLD AGE

by

Ira V. Morris

Mr. Simpson, an old man of eighty-two, was taken with a violent attack of coughing while walking down the street, and was forced to give up his walk and retire to his room on the top floor of a fourth-rate tenement building. He proceeded to warm some water in a pan above the smelly stove and, having extracted a silver half-dollar from the recesses of an old sock, entrusted this to the six-year-old son of a fellow lodger with instructions to purchase half a dozen bouillon cubes and a ten cent package of cocoa. Then he pulled off his clothes, climbed into bed and, turning his face towards the cracked wall, tried to go to sleep.

Mr. Simpson had been taking cold regularly every winter for the last ten years but, despite his age, he had thus far escaped without contracting that dire evil which, in Mr. Simpson's vocabulary, was termed "neumonie." This was the more remarkable as his apartment, so called, was unfortunately not endowed with any such convenience as a heating system, the landlord being doubtless of the opinion that this was one feature of modern housing which might well be left to the choice of the individual tenant. The icy wind whistled through each tiny crack and took advantage of the broken window pane, only partly blocked up with a piece of cardboard and some stray rags. All alone, the little oil stove waged its hopeless

fight, bravely sending forth the whiffs of hot fetid air that were to keep Mr. Simpson's old bones warm.

Mr. Simpson nursed along his colds as a mother might her only babe. As soon as they had reached the stage known as "climactic," that is, just when they were thinking of turning into neumonie, he began laying his preparations for the arduous process entitled "breaking through the phlegm." This momentous undertaking, consisting in the execution of various rather odd operations conducive to the "getting up of a sweat," the "settling of the bile" and the "purging of the bladder," concluded with the consumption of a steaming beverage concocted from large numbers of evil smelling herbs and thereupon falling asleep. The old man had absolute faith in his cure and, strange as it may seem, he always woke up next morning perfectly well and able to go out for a walk though he had been coughing off his head for weeks. Mr. Simpson really enjoyed his colds for the pleasure it gave him to get over them. His financial affairs were hardly what one might call flourishing, but even had he been a millionaire he should never have consented to see a doctor or take a drop of medicine.

One night, three weeks after Mr. Simpson had taken to his bed, he was visited by a friend, a youngish man of about seventy, named Jennings. This Jennings, who was Mr. Simpson's only visitor, came to see him once a week, and when his friend had a cold, even oftener. He was quite as poor or even poorer than Mr. Simpson, but he lived with his daughter and his son-in-law who was a plumber and consequently well off; old Mr. Jennings puttered about their house looking for something to do, and he knew they all considered him as a great nuisance and wished he would die. He ate with the family though they only gave him mush and turnips saying it was best for his teeth; but Mr. Jennings knew better and he yearned for

meat. Formerly he had often been able to sneak some good things in his pocket while no one was looking which he would later bring to his friend's room to make a feast of. Now, however, they had begun to suspect him, and when he left the house his pockets were carefully examined; his daughter had even forbidden him to go out altogether.

"Where you going now, pa?" she would scream if she caught sight of her father moving toward the door. "This is no weather for an old fellow like you to be going out in—you stay here," and Mr. Jennings would look about embarrassed, and shuffle back into the house.

Each time he stole his allowance was cut off for a whole month. It is hard to have your pocket money stopped; who is going to give an old fellow his tobacco and his chewing gum? Yes, those were hard months.

Tonight, however, Mr. Jennings had had luck. Not only had he succeeded in slipping out without his daughter's noticing, but in his pocket rested a little greasy package containing a number of slices of delicious bacon.

"Brought something good for you tonight," said Mr. Jennings in a cracked voice that sounded like rusty machinery, as he hung his wisp of a coat on a twisted nail in the wall and then held his frozen hand towards the oil stove. "How you feeling?"

"Poorly—I'm not well."

Mr. Jennings glanced hastily towards his friend and he saw that two red spots had appeared in the sunken cheeks, there certainly was no denying that Mr. Simpson was not a well man, but he said, trying, to be cheerful:

"Wait till the climax comes. That's the time to break through the phlegm and end it at one shot. That's the only way to kill it."

Usually at this point Mr. Simpson would take up the conversation, explaining just how one should go about breaking

up the phlegm, but tonight he said nothing. So, after a moment's silence, Mr. Jennings, feeling he must say something, went over to the window and looking out into the icy night, said:

"Seems to be getting a bit warmer out."

As if in answer, his host was seized with a violent fit of coughing. It began low down in the stomach and seemed to travel gradually upwards till it finally broke in his throat, while his face grew more and more livid, his body shook, and he seemed to be at grips with a living creature. When it was over he let himself fall back on his bed, exhausted and groaning, and drew the dirty bed covers up about his neck.

Mr. Simpson's coughing was nothing new to his friend, but the fury of this attack dismayed even him.

"Must break the phlegm soon," he murmured, and to avoid having to say anything more, he went quickly to his coat, fumbled about in the pockets, and finally drew forth the dirty newspaper parcel containing the slices of bacon.

"This'll do you good," he said, making the sick man smell the food, "this is just what you need. Slipped into the kitchen this afternoon while my daughter was upstairs—the witch. She knew I'd taken it, but couldn't find it anywhere to save her soul. I was too clever for her—had it hid behind a flower pot all the time. He-he-he," the old man cackled.

While he was talking, Mr. Jennings had been getting down a rusty frying pan from a hook in the wall, had thrown in some slices of bacon and begun to fry them on the oil stove. Before long the meat began to sizzle, filling the room with its tantalizing aroma. Mr. Jennings' nose twitched, and the tears came into his swollen, red eyes; but Mr. Simpson lay still in bed and his lungs wheezed when he drew the cold night air into them. Nor did he evince any desire to touch the delectable morsels when, after they had been cooked to a nicety, his friend

removed them from the pan to a large platter. Mr. Jennings had never known Mr. Simpson's appetite to fail, and in his mind this was the worst sign possible: for some reason he felt that his friend was trying to vex him.

"Come on, take a few pieces," he urged trying to force a plate into the sick man's hand, "it'll do you good. How you going to keep your strength up if you don't eat?"

"Le'me alone," said Mr. Simpson weakly, "I ain't got no appetite—I don't want none."

"When d'you eat last?" persisted Mr. Jennings. "You need someone to take care of you, that's what—an old fellow like you."

"I cooked me some soup yesterday—I ain't got no appetite." The old man was interrupted by another fit of coughing even more prolonged than the first; he bent himself almost double in bed, and his body shook so that the springs creaked. Mr. Jennings walked about in anguish till it was over; then he sat down again, took the platter on his knee, and sadly began to devour his bacon.

"When you going take your cure?" he asked after a moment. There was no answer.

"Ain't you planning take your cure pretty soon?" he repeated. "Guess it's just about climaxic now."

"Oh, I'll be taking it pretty soon now," replied Mr. Simpson evasively, "phlegm's got to gather first."

A blast of wind flew against the window, making the loose panes rattle and whistling maliciously through the cracks: the flickering gas jet gasped, and even the oil stove shuddered faintly.

"It's a shame, my being here," groaned Mr. Simpson, turning over on his other side and drawing the dirty blankets still further up. "I ought to have a comfortable, warm place, and those stairs kill me each time I go out. My son never would have allowed it if he'd lived."

Mr. Simpson never complained, and that he did so now struck Mr. Jennings as another bad sign. He knew very well that the son he spoke of had been a drunken good-for-nothing who preyed on his old father's poor earnings, but wishing to comfort the old man, he muttered:

"Yes, yes, he was a fine fellow, he would have helped you all right. But I don't see that you have an awful lot to complain of. Why, you're comfortable as anyone would wish to be—good warm room here," and he looked about the room, at the broken wash stand in the corner, the splintered wooden chair by the door, and the almost empty cupboard near the bed, from which the paint had fallen in patches: every bit of furniture in the room could not have been disposed of for the price of a square meal.

"Those stairs are what's worst," Mr. Simpson went on in his wheezy old man's voice, "they oughtn't to allow stairs like them to be built. It's bad for my lungs to climb them stairs—I ought to have a place on the bottom floor. Sometimes I can't go out for days simply 'cause I'm 'fraid of climbing back up them stairs—it takes me twenty minutes sometimes to get up 'em."

"Yes, you ought to complain 'bout 'em," agreed Mr. Jennings, though he knew very well there was no one to complain to and that it was only because the landlord allowed the old man to stay on rent free that he was still there at all. The "House" was the proper place for him; but who can blame an old fellow who has no one but himself left for trying to keep up some show of self respect? Not even the landlord had the heart to see him thrown into that heap of discards; and anyway, who would have rented that drafty, miserable hole?

The two old men were silent a moment. Mr. Jennings had finished all but a few slices of the bacon, which he put away in the cupboard after asking hopefully:

"You ain't maybe changed your mind and got an appetite now—just from watching me eat?"

Mr. Simpson shook his head.

"When you going take your cure?" asked Mr. Jennings again at length.

"I just told you—" Mr. Simpson started to say, but another racking cough interrupted him.

When it had passed over he lay panting from exhaustion, with his eyes closed. Then he opened his eyes and said:

"There's a Bible under the pillow here. Get it out and read some."

For all the years they had been acquainted, Mr. Jennings had never before known that his friend was religious or even that he possessed a Bible. He himself had never been much occupied with the word of the Lord.

He fetched forth the Bible and asked:

"Where you want me to read?"

"Read something in the Old Testament," said Mr. Simpson, "Ezekiel or Isaiah—that's beautiful."

Mr. Jennings searched in his pocket for his silver-rimmed spectacles, found the place, and, after turning up the gas light, began reading in a withered, dry old voice, bending over to decipher the longer words:

"For thus saith the Lord God; behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep and find them out.

"As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out my sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the dark and cloudy day."

"I will feed them upon a good pasture, and upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be: I will feed my flock and will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God."

Mr. Simpson drank in the words, and a gleam came into his faded eyes.

"That's lovely," he said, "read that again."

Mr. Jennings read the last verse again, but then his voice began to fail.

"Do you believe that?" he asked, laying the book down on the bed. "Do you believe what's written here?"

"Yes, I believe it," said Mr. Simpson solemnly, "it's the Lord's voice."

"Well, maybe it is," said his friend doubtfully after a moment, "but I dun'no—I don't see it clearly nohow—I dun'no what to think."

"It's the Lord's Word," insisted Mr. Simpson. "Who are we to doubt His Word? We are but the sheep of His hand."

Mr. Jennings thought a while in silence.

"Well maybe it's the Lord's Word," he said finally, "but it's not clear to me—no, I can't say it's clear. If it's true, why doesn't the Lord protect us then? No, things somehow don't just seem right."

"The Lord says He will strike down the unbeliever," cried Mr. Simpson, struggling to sit up. "There is no place for the doubter in the army of the Lord. He is our good shepherd—we are the sheep of His Hands."

"Well, why don't he take care of us then'," repeated Mr. Jennings. "It don't seem right. Here we been working hard all our life—ain't you and I been god-fearing and just men? Why don't the Lord help us now when we're old and worn with labour—ain't that what he says he'll do?"

"The Lord bides his time—who are we to question the work of the Lord? Ain't you read the book of Job? The Lord loads his servants with vicissitudes."

"Well, that ain't just neither. I've had enough vicissitudes by now. Where is God's helping hand?"

"Stop your blaspheming!" shouted Mr. Simpson, and the two red spots in his cheeks flamed darker. "I shan't listen to you any more. The Lord is our help and our salvation: we are all the sheep of His hand. I won't talk to a blasphemer of the Lord. Go home!"

Mr. Jennings got up, his old man's temper aroused, and, still mumbling, began to struggle into his coat. He crushed his battered hat on his head and wound himself in his muffler. At the door he stopped and looked at his friend, who had already turned his back towards him: he was about to say something, but thought better of it and went out, slamming the door. Mr. Simpson could hear him cautiously descend the winding stairs.

The old man lay quite still feeling weak and dizzy after the excitement. Now that his temper began to cool, he was sorry for what he had said and wished that his friend would come back.

But how could he have explained that strange outburst to Mr. Jennings? An old man must have something to cling to, and if one thing goes he must grasp hold of another before he drowns. How could he have told his friend that he had already undergone the cure, the famous cure in which he had such faith, and that for once it had failed, for once it had not broken through the phlegm? Neumonie was at the door, the dark days were at hand. And how could he have admitted that it was black despair which had caused him to turn to the Bible and to cling so frantically to this last straw? No, how could he have admitted that, even to himself?

For some time after this visit Mr. Jennings could not get out to pay his friend another call. When he finally did, he found the room empty, the carpenters at work making it over. And he was told that Mr. Simpson had been buried the day before.

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